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The Brain Brief - Vol. 3, No. 1

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Message from the Scientific Director



Dr. Remi Quirion, Ph.D, FRSC, CQ
Scientific Director

Happy spring from INMHA! It has been a busy winter for us. The final step in the evaluation of CIHR and the Institutes took place February 13th-15th when the International Review Panel under the leadership of Dr. John Bell met in Ottawa. The Panel met with representatives from each of the thirteen Institutes, CIHR staff, and over 125 health researchers and stakeholders from across Canada. We eagerly await the final report which we anticipate will be posted on the CIHR website in early July.

CIHR and the Institutes are turning increasing attention to knowledge translation (KT) - the process through which research information is "translated" and disseminated to audiences outside the research community, and put into action by a variety of end users. The CIHR Act mandates CIHR to do research on knowledge translation, as well as to be an active player in the process of knowledge translation, and we anticipate that the final report of the Internal Review Panel will encourage CIHR to do more in this area. The final report of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology on mental health and addiction, chaired by Senator Kirby, and submissions to INMHA's Unique Challenges call note that application of research results is vitally important in ensuring that those suffering from mental illness and addiction have access to the most effective treatments. INMHA is responding to these expressed needs. Our Mental Health in the Workplace Request for Applications (RFA), which will fund research beginning in November 2006, focuses on applying knowledge in real-world settings with researchers and workplace partners working together as a team. In June 2006 INMHA will launch a new RFA on knowledge translation in the mental health and addiction area more generally.

I was pleased with the very comprehensive report of Sen. Kirby's Committee, which recognized the work of INMHA by recommending that the Government commit an additional $25 million for research into mental health, mental illness and addiction, to be administered by INMHA in partnership with external stakeholders (see below under "Features and News").

The recent federal budget brought an increase of $17 million in funding for CIHR - good news but less than what had been hoped for. Some difficult decisions will have to be made - but INMHA remains committed to the

open operating grants competition, funded several grants from the September 2005 competition (see "Competition Results" below), and hopes to do so again in the future.

Renewal of INMHA's current strategic plan, adopted in 2001 with a five-year horizon, will be completed at the next two Institute Advisory Board meetings. The Kirby report, the feedback from the Unique Challenges call, and the changing landscape of needs and research in the areas within our mandate, will inform our future direction and activities for the next few years.

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Current Funding Opportunities

2006 CIHR Outreach Initiative for NGOs

INMHA and the Institute of Gender and Health (IGH) are jointly running this popular program for a third successive year. The general aim is to develop communications-related partnerships with Canadian non-governmental, non-profit, and community-based organizations. Overall objectives of the program are:

- To foster communications-related partnerships between CIHR and NGOs/stakeholders with specific emphasis on health research related to the priorities of INMHA. and IGH
- To identify original communications opportunities, and define an approach and work-plan for completing them.
- To target specific audiences/communities that will benefit from being better informed about CIHR and IHMHA or IGH related initiatives.

There will be four awards of up to $10,000 each. Application deadline is May 31st 2006. For more information, please see http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/30978.html, or contact Asimina Xidous at axidous@cihr-irsc.gc.ca

Canada-Finland Collaborative Program in Substance Abuse and Addictions

INMHA is pleased to announce a new partnership with the Academy of Finland (AF) to support collaborative research projects in substance abuse and addictions (see http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/27899.html). The collaboration is part of a new Research Program recently announced by AF. INMHA will support the project component that is carried out in Canada through grants of up to $30,000 per year for two years. The application process will be managed by AF and the full application including all information concerning the Canadian team must be submitted to AF no later than June 2, 2006. Full program and application details can be found on the AF website. For further information, please contact Astrid Eberhart at aeberhart@cihr-irsc.gc.ca.

Program Announcement: Biology of Manual Therapies

The National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Institute of Musculoskeletal Health and Arthritis (IMHA) and INMHA invite applications for funding of basic, mechanistic, and/or preclinical research focused on the mechanisms underlying the biomechanical, immunological, endocrinological and/or neurophysiological consequences of manual therapies, such as spinal manipulation, mobilization and massage therapy. Such studies will both provide information on the possible mechanisms of action of manual therapies, and also provide a stronger foundation for ongoing and planned clinical studies. Applicants are encouraged to employ cutting-edge technologies to broaden or strengthen the knowledge bases needed to improve clinical practice.

For further details, please visit: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PAR-06-312.html

Knowledge Translation in Mental Health

INMHA plans to launch an RFA on knowledge translation in mental health in June 2006, with a focus on research synthesis and intervention research. This will be posted with other funding opportunities sometime during June 2006.

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Program Updates

Competition Results

Suicide Prevention Targeting Aboriginal People - New Emerging Team

(Announced January 2006) Of five applications received, two were approved for funding (success rate 40%) For more information please see http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/30439.html.

Research in Addictions: Innovative Approaches in Health Research

(Announced March 2006) Applications approved were as follows: three out of eleven New Discoveries - High Risk Seed Grants; three out of thirteen New Emerging Team Grant applications; one out of seven Policy Research Grant applications; three out of ten Secondary Analysis Grant applications; and zero out of four Knowledge Synthesis Grant applications (overall success rate 22%). For more information, please see http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/30721.html.

Early Life Events and First Episodes of Brain Disorders

(Announced April 2006) Applications approved were as follows: two out of five New Discoveries - High Risk Seed Grants, and two out of fourteen New Emerging Team grants (overall success rate 21%). For more information please see http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/31061.html.

New Emerging Team Grant - Neuroethics

(Announced March 2006) A total of 2 researchers who submitted Letters of Intent were invited to submit full applications in December 2005. Applications were reviewed by the Neuroethics committee (NNE), resulting in one application being approved for funding (success rate of 50%). For more information please see http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/30804.html.

Mental Health in the Workplace: Delivering Evidence for Action

(Announced April 2006) Following peer review of twenty-three Letters of Intent in March 2006, a total of sixteen applicants were invited to submit full applications. For more information please see http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/30939.html.

Each research team sent researcher and workplace partner representatives to a face-to-face meeting in Ottawa on April 27th 2007 to begin the process of networking researchers in the field and to discuss the full application process.

Operating Grants Priority Announcement

INMHA was pleased to be able to provide partial funding for four operating grants from the September 2005 open operating grants competition.
For more information please see http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/30609.html.

Unique Challenges

In July 2005 INMHA issued the Unique Challenges call soliciting stakeholder feedback on the major challenges in mental health and addictions research. Over 40 INMHA submissions were received from provincial authorities, voluntary organizations, scientists ranging from basic science to clinicians and population health and health services research, as well as the private sector. The proposal from the Canadian Collaborative Mental Health Initiative (CCMHI, Executive Director Scott Dudgeon) was the highest ranked.

The other three top-ranked proposals were:

- Canadian Mental Health Services Knowledge Translation Network (Paula Goering, Elliot Goldner and Alain Lesage)
- A National Strategy for Research in Mental Health and Addictions: Focus on Children and Youth (Terry Russell)
- Psychiatric Epigenomics: a National Strategy for Research in Mental Health in Canada (Art Petronis)

See "INMHA International Activities" below for results of collaborative programs with Finland and Japan.

Regenerative Medicine and Nanomedicine Initiative (RMNI)

Results from the 2004 RMNI RFAs are now available online http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/30741.html. Briefly, 10 Team Grants and 8 New Discoveries: High-Risk Seed Grants were funded in this round. Results of the 2005 RFA Team Grant Letter of Intent (LOI) review are also now available online http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/30765.html. A total of 34 LOIs was received, of which 30 were invited to submit a full application for the May 1, 2006 deadline. The registration deadline for 2005 RFA New Discoveries: High-Risk Seed Grant has recently passed, with full applications also due May 1, 2006. A re-launch of the Initiative is planned for December, 2006.

The fourth annual Nanomedicine workshop will be held in conjunction with the Nanoforum meeting at the NRC National Institute for Nanotechnology (NINT) on June 19-20, 2006 in Edmonton (University of Alberta). Details will be available shortly on the Initiative website http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29542.html.

For further information on RMNI activities, please visit the RMNI website http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29542.html or contact Asimina Xidous axidous@cihr-irsc.gc.ca, project officer, or Dr. Eric Marcotte emarcotte@cihr-irsc.gc.ca, Associate Director.

INMHA International Activities

Collaborations with Finland

In January, INMHA announced the results of a joint funding program with the Academy of Finland: http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/30161.html. The collaboration is part of the Academy's NEURO program, a four-year major funding initiative in neuroscience that also involves the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC). The program will support 16 Finnish, four Finnish-Chinese and three Finnish-Canadian research projects spanning six major research themes from molecular and cellular neuroscience to the ethical, philosophical and socio-cultural aspects of neuroscience. The goal is to promote multi-disciplinary research and research training and to establish more effective networking and collaboration between researchers in Canada, Finland and China. The Academy's model for strategic initiatives involves continuous oversight and networking meetings at the beginning, mid-term and at the end of the four-year program. The opening seminar and networking meeting took place on April 6 and 7 in Finland and involved PIs and project team members as well as the members of the Program Steering Committee and the evaluation panels,.

Based on the positive response to the NEURO program, INMHA has now joined forces with the Academy on a new program in addictions (see above under Funding Opportunities). The international component of the "Program in Substance Abuse and Addictions" was announced in early March and will also involve funding agencies in Russia.

Collaborations with Japan

CIHR recently announced the results of the Japan-Canada Joint Health Research Program, established in 2003 and jointly managed and funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) and CIHR (see http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/30619.html). Four joint grants were made in the recent competition, bringing the total number of collaborative projects funded to date to eleven, including seven by INMHA. The program is led by INMHA in partnership with the Institute of Aging (IA) and the Institute of Human Development, Child and Youth Health (IHDCYH).

The peer review process for the program is conducted in two steps, the first one separately by CIHR and JSPS and the second one through a Joint Selection Committee. This year's Joint Selection Committee meeting, hosted by JSPS in Tokyo in January, was attended by members of the Brain Sciences Panel and

representatives from INMHA, IA and IHDCYH. The Brain Sciences Panel was established by the Canada-Japan Joint Committee, a government-to-government body that oversees collaborations between the two countries.

To encourage new collaborations and applications to the joint funding program, each Institute also hosted a scientific workshop with the help of the Canadian Embassy. INMHA's workshop on Brain Science at the Canadian Embassy featured seven Japanese-Canadian speaking teams (including one by Michael Salter of the Hospital for Sick Children and his collaborator Kazuhide Inoue of Kyushu University, the first grant recipients under the JSPS-CIHR Program), a poster session and a reception. The event was attended by over 50 people eminent Japanese scientists and government officials, including Canadian Ambassador Joseph Caron and Ambassador Yukio Takasu of Japan. We are currently exploring a possible expansion of the collaboration with JSPS to include a team grant program.

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Meetings and Events

STIHR meeting

Training future generations of researchers has been a major strategic goal of INMHA with investment of approximately one-third of INMHA's budget on STIHRs (Strategic Training Initiatives in Health Research) in 2004-2005. Eighteen STIHR programs are associated with INMHA, the largest number of any of the 13 CIHR Institutes. On November 28th and 29th 2005 in Montreal, INMHA held a workshop that was attended by over 90 participants, including PIs and trainees, with up to 5 representatives from each of the 18 STIHRs associated with INMHA.

Workshop goals were as follows:

- To provide PIs and trainees from these STIHRs exposure to the largest possible spectrum of research in the areas of neurosciences, mental health and addiction.
- To develop increased interactions between the STIHR programs
- To give a unique opportunity for trainees for scientific exchange and networking with peers and established researchers
- To identify some 'best practices' that could be used by the INMHA community

Highlights included a session on building meaningful partnerships. Guests included Dr. Alycia Halladay from the National Alliance on Autism Research, a major funding partner for two of the STIHR programs, and Dr. Marielle Gascon-Barre from the FRSQ, another major INMHA STIHR funding partner. Another highlight was a trainee-led session in which trainees described their experiences with different STIHRs, the benefits and difficulties associated with these, and their hopes and expectations for the future of the program. The session was complemented with a presentation of research posters from each of the trainees in attendance. These posters showcased the richness and diversity of the research being done by trainees in the various STIHR programs.

The major recommendations from the workshop were that the STIHR program should be continued as a major strategic program of CIHR, and that existing STIHRs should be allowed to apply for renewal in future STIHR funding competitions

Barbara Turnbull Award for Spinal Cord Research

On March 2nd in a ceremony at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto, Dr. Joseph Culotti, Senior Investigator at the Samuel Lunenfeld Research Institute was presented with the 2005 Barbara Turnbull Award for Spinal Cord Research. The award, made possible through a partnership of the Barbara Turnbull Foundation and NeuroScience Canada with INMHA, provides a $50,000 supplement to the CIHR grant of the top-ranked spinal cord researcher in CIHR's open operating grants competition in a given year. Barbara Turnbull is a well known Toronto journalist and research activist who was shot and paralyzed from the neck-down during a convenience store robbery in 1983 when she was 18. She established this Award recognize excellence in spinal cord research and to increase public awareness that over ten million Canadians are afflicted with neurological and psychiatric disorders.

This year's award recognizes Dr. Culotti's basic research in understanding the growth and migration of nerve cells in development and repair of the nervous system. This knowledge may ultimately be critical to any future processes to repair spinal cords. Dr. Culotti's lab uses a worm, the nematode C. elegans, as a model of the human spinal cord. The team is credited with discovering that nematode neurons use the same molecules and molecular mechanisms for their growth and migration as neurons in the human spinal cord - prompting scientists to refer to the spinal cord as "the worm within us".

Dr. Culotti is the fourth winner of this award, which was established in 2001. Previous winners are Dr. David Kaplan of the Hospital for Sick Children, Dr. Mohamad Sawan of the École Polytechnique de Montréal, and Dr. David Bennett of the University of Alberta.

Over 50 people attended the presentation, including executives of Mount Sinai Hospital and the Samual Lunenfeld Research Institute, students and researchers from the Samuel Lunenfeld Research Institute and several members of INMHA's Institute Advisory Board. The award was presented by Barbara Turnbull, Inez Jabalpurwala (President of NeuroScience Canada) and Rémi Quirion.

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Features and News

Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Mental Health and Addiction

The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, co-Chaired by Senators Michael Kirby and Wilbert Keon, released its final report on May 9th 2006 after three years of work. The full report, entitled "Out of the Shadows At Last", contains 118 separate recommendations and can be accessed under "Reports" at
http://www.parl.gc.ca/common/Committee_SenRecentReps.asp?Language=E&Parl=39&Ses=1.

The recommendations fall into the following areas: legal issues, the health delivery system, children and youth, seniors, workplace and employment, addiction, self-help and peer support, research, tele-mental health, the federal direct service role, Aboriginal peoples, promotion and prevention, and national mental health initiatives. Key enabling elements would include a Mental Health Transition Fund, the Canadian Mental Health Commission, and a Knowledge Exchange Centre.

Of special interest to INMHA are the following recommendations:

- A Canadian Mental Health Commission should be established with $17 million in annual funding. Of this, $5 million p.a. should go to a national anti-stigma campaign and $6 million p.a. to a Knowledge Exchange Centre (107).
- CIHR should seek more opportunities for partnership with the private and not-for-profit sector and should formalize the involvement of NGOs, patients and families in priority setting and peer review (54, 55)
- The Government of Canada should commit an additional $25 million per year for research on clinical, health services and population health aspects of mental health, mental illness and addiction; funds to be administered by INMHA in partnership with the Commission and stakeholders (56).
- INMHA should increase funding for training and clinical research in mental health and addictions and for research into self-help and peer support (58, 49).
- INMHA should increase its efforts in knowledge translation in mental health, mental illness and addictions (60).
- INMHA should work with the Commission and other stakeholders to develop a national research agenda (61).
- CIHR should increase research on Aboriginal suicide and addiction (additional funding from the Government of Canada (99 & 100).

The Case for Canada's Increased Investment in Neuroscience Research: Neuroscience Canada

On March 15th as part of Brain Awareness Week, Neuroscience Canada released a report entitled "The Case for Canada's Increased Investment in Neuroscience Research". The report calls for recognition of the real economic burden that all brain disorders together represent and for more research funding.

There are more than 1,000 diseases, disorders and injuries of the brain, spinal cord and nervous system. They include Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, stroke, multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injury, depression, schizophrenia, sense organ diseases, addictions, traumatic brain injury and chronic pain. Based on Health Canada data, the economic burden of these disorders is conservatively estimated at 14% of the total burden of disease, or $22.7 billion annually. These estimates do not take into consideration suffering and disability that do not result in death or hospitalization, nor do they reflect lost productivity or the psychological costs to patients and caregivers.

The report recommends increased investment in large-scale neuroscience projects, and increases in the INMHA and CIHR budgets.

The full report, as well as the executive summary, is available online at http://www.neurosciencecanada.ca/.

CPRF Welcomes New Executive Director

Effective March 31, 2006, Judy Hills retired from her position as the Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation (CPRF) Executive Director.

Judy has served CPRF in this capacity over the past 7 ½ years. Under her leadership, the Foundation has funded millions of dollars of cutting-edge research at facilities across Canada, and has taken on new roles in public education and awareness. Judy will stay involved with the organization in her new role as a consultant to CPRF on projects and initiatives.

Joan Montgomery has assumed the role of Executive Director. Joan has been with the organization since October, 2005. She previously served for 4 ½ years as the CEO of the Schizophrenia Society of Canada and has played a key volunteer management role in the Canadian Alliance for Mental Illness and Mental Health.

Neuromed Pharmaceuticals Announces $475 Million Deal with Merck

In late March, Vancouver's Neuromed Pharmaceuticals signed an agreement with Merck & Co. that is being billed as the largest licensing deal in Canada's biotech history.

The $475-million US deal will see the development and commercialization of Neuromed's experimental pain-blocking drug NMED-160 and give the University of B.C. spinoff the means to further its development of other new drugs aimed at treating epilepsy and hypertension. The drug, currently in Phase II clinical trials, came out of 14 years of MRC/CIHR-funded research by Dr. Terry Snutch, a professor in the Michael Smith Laboratories at UBC.

2006 International Brain Bee Champion

The 2006 International Brain Bee (IBB) champion is Canadian Jong Park from Toronto, Ontario and the second place winner is Kim Chai of Hamilton Ontario. The Brain Bee is modeled after a "spelling bee" and is the premier international neuroscience competition for high school students sponsored by the University of Maryland, the Thadikonda Foundation, and the Society for Neuroscience. This year's competition took place on March 17th & 18th at the University of Maryland in Baltimore during Brain Awareness Week.

The competition consisted of two full days that included orals, written, a neuroanatomy lab practical, a patient diagnosis section, a group competition and more than 40 rounds of questioning by neuroscientists.

Jong receives $3000, a trip for two to Atlanta, Georgia to attend the Society for Neuroscience meeting, and an opportunity to work for a summer in the lab of a famous neuroscientist. His school gets the IBB Traveling Trophy.

For more information on this competition please visit http://web.sfn.org/baw/bee.cfm
L'Hôpital Sainte-Anne

Sainte-Anne's Hospital, a long-term care facility offering programs and services to veterans, is located at the West end of the island of Montreal. It specializes in services for mental health problems related to operational

stress (post-traumatic stress disorder) and has recently begun to focus on supporting research and bridging the gap between research and clinical practice in gerontology and mental health. Goals include developing partnerships, stimulating multidisciplinary research, supporting knowledge transfer activities and research training. Research priorities are: dementia, pain, post-traumatic stress, and nutrition and aging. For more information, contact Maryse L. Savoie at (514) 457 - 3440 x. 2572 or maryse.savoie@vac-acc.gc.ca.

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Upcoming Events

Canadian Association for the Prevention of Suicide (CASP) Conference 2006

October 25-27, 2006 - Complexity of Suicide: Prevention, Intervention and Aftermath. University of Toronto Conference Centre, 89 Chestnut Street, Toronto, Ontario. For additional information, contact Allison Soares (allison.soares@utoronto.ca. Phone: 416.978.2719) or view the conference website at http://www.suicideconference2006.ca/. To view Preliminary Program and Call for Abstracts: http://www.cme.utoronto.ca/PDR/PSR0601.pdf.

INMHA Annual Meeting November 16th-18th 2006

Please mark your calendars and plan to come to Montreal for the fifth annual INMHA meeting. Stay tuned for more details.